

MEET THE AUTHOR

Harry Smith SG MC.

Dave Sabben was born in Suva, Fiji in 1945 and is a tall, handsome, and a very intelligent and competent man. He came to Australia and spent time in boarding school. In 1965, when his marble for National Service did not roll out, he decided to volunteer for National Service and then applied to attend the 1965 First Course at Officer Training Unit, (OTU), Scheyville. He graduated as a second lieutenant in late 1965, and was posted to the 6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment at Enoggera Queensland in January 1966. He joined my Delta Company as Platoon Commander 12 Platoon the day after his 21st Birthday.



Having told him not to wear his shiny pointed Italian shoes instead of his issue shoes, we got on very well. Dave had mastered most military subjects at OTU and got top marks in Map Reading. Consequently, when I wanted my Company to get to a place quickly, I always put Dave and his 12 Platoon in front.

At Long Tan in August 1966, Dave commanded his platoon with excellence and took a heavy toll on the attacking enemy forces of 275 VC Regiment, especially those trying to outflank us around 11 Platoon. His platoon, along with 10 Platoon, and the artillery support of 24 guns at Nui Dat, forced the enemy to withdraw before the APCs arrived, leaving behind 245 bodies, and carrying many others away. It was an outstanding victory for the Delta Company. Sadly, his OTU mate Gordon Sharp, who commanded 11 Platoon, was killed in the battle.

On return to Nui Dat Base, I was asked to recommend my officers and soldiers for gallantry awards and I cited Dave for a Military Cross (MC). But, although not at the action, the Task Force and Battalion Commander decorated themselves, downgrading the awards, with Dave getting a lowly MID, not the appropriate awards for a gallant platoon action. My CO got the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) although he was not at the battle, with me being awarded a Military Cross. This was the start of a rort with awards and saw all battalion COs and some ATF Commanders decorated with awards that should have gone to those who fought.

Because of a thirty year secrecy period, I was unable to seek Awards justice until 1996 and then it took until 1998 to get Dave upgraded to Medal of Gallantry, the MC being no longer an available award in the 1990 Australian system of awards.

Dave has amassed an enormous amount of detail in this book, sourced from his letters to his first wife Sue. With a variety of maps and charts it is essentially a day by day account of his platoon activities in South Vietnam 1966-67. Despite the passage of years, Dave's book is well worth reading and young officers would be well advised to get a copy and understand what makes a good platoon, commanded by a very good platoon commander.

I commend his book to all.

Harry Smith SG MC, Lt Colonel (Retd)
former OC D Coy 6RAR SVN 1966-67